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ABSTRACT

This speech describes the School-Community-Pupil Program of the Jane Addams Graduate School of Social Work designed to adjust not only the child to school, but also the school to the child. The program educates social work students to team up with other professionals to effect changes needed for groups of children. Through courses emphasizing the institutional aspects of the school, program evaluation, and intervention strategies for change, and through a year's internship stressing human relations and self-assessment skills, students learn to maintain credibility with the client system and professional associates while fulfilling the accountability function. In seminars, social work students learn to use recordings, communication, and evaluation to achieve accountability. The author presents examples of student developed objectives and timelines, created for specific intern projects. (Author/LAA)

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INTRODUCING CHANGE IN SCHOOL-COMMUNITY-PUPIL RELATIONSHIPS

MAINTAINING CREDIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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The School-Community-Pupil Program of the Jane Addams Graduate School of Social Work is a training program involving an attempt to bring about change in one unit of a larger system--that unit being the pupil personnel services and the system being that of the school. We feel that through this unit some changes can be brought about which will affect the way in which the school system responds to the children. Our notion is that pupil personnel workers' efforts in the school go beyond that of modifying a child or his family's behavior to that of modifying the school's behavior. It is not simply a matter of adjusting children to the school but adjusting the school to children. With this conviction we have established a program for educating social work students to team up with other professionals, e.g. psychologists, nurses, counselors, to bring about changes needed for groups of children. The student work with a problem situation which affects larger groups of children rather than with individual children and their basic approach is problem-solving and planning to initiate or revise programs and policies affecting these children. We have a major concern with school systems serving minority children and communities.

In order to educate our students effectively for this function, however, we have had to expand their knowledge and methods base. They must understand the characteristics of systems and the ordering in those systems. They must understand how to assess and evaluate programs in that system, including their own work. They must understand the process of intervening in the system as well as finding effective ways for delivering the services they introduce. As a result, three courses

for these "new professionals" in the school have been established. They are: "The School as a Public Institution;" "Program Evaluation;" and "Intervention Strategies for Change." For students in the program we use a strong advisement approach to help students acquire complementary courses elsewhere in the School of Social Work or in other departments.

The internship in the second year of the program takes place in school systems for twelve months. In moving into the change role in these systems, there are many vulnerabilities for the students. Their functions are misperceived and misunderstood; their presence raises strains and tensions (as any good change process does). Some persons already in the system want them to be "traditional," and there is pressure to diffuse any team operation that does more than meet around a "diagnostic" or case conference. Thus, in our field instruction a paramount concern is with the human relations and use of self-skills. Much attention must be paid to how they transmit their knowledge and convictions and how they influence others.

A major responsibility of any person acting as a change agent is to maintain credibility with client systems and professional associates while fulfilling the accountability functions associated with the employer-employee relationship. In the public school setting the employer is the board of education. In actual practice, the sanction to perform assigned tasks is awarded or with-held by the school administration, represented by a principal or a central office administrator such as the superintendent or a director of a program, including the school

social work service. Each of these administrative staff people hold or have access to the power to neutralize or prevent the school social work change agent from effective activity. Therefore, a very early task in system change work within the public school setting is to develop their support. While developing administrator support may be construed as a limiting feature to the type of changes that can be addressed, it is true that without this support there will be little chance to effect any worthwhile change. Also, the school social work program may have an exceedingly short tenure.

The approach to credibility and accountability used in the School-Community-Pupil program combines elements of three traditional functions routinely accepted by social workers, even though not always implemented equally in practice. These three traditional functions are: 1. Recording, whether on individual clients or groups of clients; 2. Social worker communication with agency administrators, such as monthly or periodic reports on practice activity; 3. Evaluation activities in relationship to practice. These functions were reformulated for the school-community-pupil project: 1. A change agent needs to have a form of "recording" which will serve as a monitoring device on practice; 2. Agency (school) administrators must be well informed about what the school social worker is doing and expects to be doing. Otherwise, it is likely that the pressures on the administrators to prevent change oriented activity will be intolerable; 3. Social workers, customarily use caseload volume, number of contacts, or some similar measure as an index of work accomplished. There is a need for change

agents operating in a highly intangible area to develop a reporting device that includes an accountability feature.

In the judgment of faculty involved in the development of the School-Community-Pupil project, the measure of accomplishment as an index of work done, would be a critical feature of the program that would probably become central to its continuation in the public schools. To address this problem through the graduate school program, research seminars titled "Program Evaluation" were created.

The first of the seminars was designed to help the student learn how to resolve the credibility, accountability problem. The second course served to monitor the students progress in doing this activity while assigned to field work in the public schools. Examples of student reports will be used to serve as illustrations.

Following acceptance of the initial field work assignment, groups of students were expected to work together as a team or to associate themselves with other school staff to form a team. However, student members needed to do a self assessment of their interests and capabilities. This first assignment had two related objectives: Students repeatedly would be asked by local school staff, "what can you do?" An honest answer needs to be readily available. The second part was that typically beginning students had either misty eyed daydreams about the great changes they can bring about which will correct the deficiencies of the public school system, or they are so anxious that they don't think they can accomplish any change. The self-assessment was designed to help the students identify the reality of their own talents and

interests. Here is an example from one of the teams initial self-assessment:

"As a team of school social work interns, we wish to initially, concretely conceptualize what our roles will be within the system, and the coordination with the appropriate administrative persons. We feel that in so doing, we will be more able to realistically formulate methodology for evaluating our performance, develop channels for giving progressive feedback to appropriate persons, and will be more willing to accept accountability for our team and our individual success or failure." Following this statement of team assessment, this group of students worked out a brief outline of how they expected to work together and then developed a statement of competence and interest presented in chart form.

TABLE A

COMPETENCE AND INTERESTS OF AN SCP TEAM

Competence & Interests	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D
Work with student groups (problem situation orientation)	H	M	M	H
Work with interested comm. members/groups	H	H	H	H
Development of social services not presently available/modification of present ones	M	M	L	M
Interaction with teachers related to mutual concerns; in-service training progress & curriculum development	L	M	M	H
Planning of goals for team(s); evaluation of above & proper feedback to administration	L	H	L	L
Contracting with resource people for specific needs arising	H	M	H	H

H = High; M = Medium; L = Low

This conceptualization is not intended to remain static, but rather is subject to modification as a broader knowledge of the school system is gained and as specific needs arise which require a more specific breakdown of areas of competence.

The next step in the process of developing credibility and accountability was expected to be a needs assessment by the student interns in the local school district. Working as a team, there was a plan to have the students identify problem situations which were of major concern to the school district and yet falling within an area in which the students had some conpetence. Very quickly, both students and faculty realized that the local school officials already knew of many major problems affecting pupils and parents and were usually willing to identify these for the school social work interns. Consequently, the needs assessment really involved an investigation of the problem situations presented to the students by school officials. Following this investigation, with administrative approval, the students selected the problem situations they would address and then began to develop a plan of operation. The problem situation plan of operation became the central communication monitoring device for school officials.

The problem situation plan of operation involved several different approaches to practice which were not uniquely new in themselves but when put together in one total package, became innovative and important. Therefore, the investigation of the student team included defining the problem situation. This might involve more data gathering, more than likely it also involved the identification of a portion of a much larger problem situation. The piece of the larger problem was one that the student intern team believed it could manage with some chance of success. It was also during this period of time that other school staff members were identified as resource people with whom the team members

would wish to associate closely. Several constraints were involved in the selection of these problem situations. Two of the most important ones were the recognition that the social work students performed at a beginning competence level. The second major constraint was the time line period or length of their placement. The problem situation selected had to be one that beginning students could make some impact upon in the relatively short time available during the field placement.

Two illustrations follow: The first is a relatively specific example of gathering simple baseline definition data and developing a behavioral type practice objective that the team member felt competent to address.

Baseline data: "The number of recorded fights during a recent four week period at _____ elementary school was eight." Practice objective: "Within a twelve-week period following the team beginnnng date, the number of recorded fights during recess and after school will drop to 50% or less in a comparable four-week period."

A second example was developed from the desire of a new school superintendent to develop better parent-school communication. The student team stated this as a general goal: "The major goal of the program being established is that of facilitating communication between the schools and the most alienated neighborhoods in the district." In this case the students could not collect baseline data so instead very specific time limited objectives were established. The following is an abbreviated outline of the time limited objectives:

September 27: Recruitment of neighborhood outreach workers. Fourteen individuals to be recruited to work in the selected neighborhoods.

October 17: Training of outreach workers completed, orientation of selected school officials completed. Joint discussion by outreach workers and school officials of issues likely to be discussed as neighborhood contacts were initiated.

October 26 through November 12: Outreach workers begin individual parent contacts.

November 12 through December 8: Outreach workers set up group get-togethers in the neighborhoods with appropriate school officials present.

December 8 through December 7: Neighborhood groups may visit schools.

January 5: Outreach workers, school officials, and pupil service team members evaluate activities. A written report is prepared."

From the calendar developed above elaborating on the generalized goal, the student interns drew up a set of action objectives, approved by the school officials and accepted by the team participants. In this case, the team participants were other school staff members and the outreach workers. Here is a sample of the action objectives for the outreach worker teams:

1. Make individual contact with 25 problem families in each neighborhood.
2. Make individual contact with 3 to 6 established neighborhood leaders.
3. Identify and begin to involve 3 to 6 existing community organizations.

4. Hold at least 6 informal neighborhood get-togethers with parents or students who have voiced similar concerns.

These action objectives make the charge to the workers very clear, but they serve an equally important function of informing and reporting to the involved school officials what is happening and what will be happening.

In this illustration, several school officials would be participating at a later stage of the project. Therefore, it became critical to the success of the project to have their cooperation. Even though all of the neighborhood outreach workers did not complete every objective, the evaluation of their activities explained why this was not possible in each particular neighborhood. For example, in reference to action objective four, above, in one neighborhood of about 60 families the outreach workers couldn't get the parents together for meetings. The parents reported that they gossiped with each other regularly and they saw no need for special meetings.

The development of such specific objectives was a difficult task for the student interns to do but they found that it had ready acceptance by school officials. It was very easy for the school officials to understand the purpose of the social work intern team activity and with an understanding of purpose there became much less concern about the methodology that the student interns might use. Even though the concern of the school officials was reduced through the development of specific objectives, the student interns maintained major responsibility for developing their own strategy of action. Following completion of

the objectives, they had the task of preparing in writing a description of what they would do to attain the objectives that they had established for themselves which were now accepted.

Again, they were to be as specific and complete as possible and they were to establish a timeline schedule by which they would expect to complete the necessary tasks which would lead to the attainment of the objectives earlier established. The previous illustration provide one example of an abbreviated time-line schedule and what follows is another example of this type of work. In this example, the objective was to significantly reduce the mean truancy rate using the previous academic year as a baseline. Five truant boys who did not meet the operational definition were included in the group along with other youngsters who did meet the operational definition of truancy. The strategy that was developed is described as follows. "The team representative decided to work with the boys in a group, the group to be co-led by the former on a weekly basis during regular academic class periods. It was felt that: 1. More children could be reached through the group work approach to the particular dysfunction, and 2. Children unmotivated to perform well academically and behaviorally through traditional means such as exclusion, punishment, or humiliation, might do so if peer pressure could be controlled and directed in a constructive way... The group met at least once a week during staggered class periods of fifty minutes. Initially, the team representatives probed to find areas of common interest which would: 1. Induce students to express themselves in a strange behavior setting, and 2. Build a group rapport

among pupils and social workers, and 3. Serve as powerful incentives for constructive group efforts.

Timelines were established as follows: 1. Group meetings to begin in October, and 2. The reduction of the rate of truancy to be achieved by June 15 of the same academic year.

This team was unable to specify intermediate timeline intervals and, therefore, shortly became bogged down in their process of working with the pupils. They had a process going but they did not have any short range objectives. This resulted in their inability to know whether they were making immediate progress.

Another team addressed the unwed mother population of a school district. Because the pregnancies could occur at any time, the first timeline established was the identification and contact with the girl within the first four months of her pregnancy. The purpose of the first conversation would be to talk with the girl and her parents about inclusion in the unwed mothers program. Simultaneously, efforts were made to enable her to receive medical guidance and follow-up. The next timeline was to enroll the expectant mother into the unwed mothers program by the fifth month of her pregnancy. The next timeline was to insure home-bound instruction was available for the unwed mother if necessary following the delivering of the baby. A follow-through timeline was to insure that the girl returned to school and the regular academic program when the physician determined it was appropriate. The final objective was to include this unwed mother as an agent to help identify other girls who may be pregnant, and at the same time phasing this specific unwed mother out of the special program.

The student intern teams found that after they had developed their specific objectives and their plan for interventive strategy, the practical business of communicating with other school staff members and school administrators about what they were doing had become much easier. Ordinarily progress reports from the intern teams could be completed in a very brief oral presentation. More than likely the progress report activity was one that could best be characterized as informal, friendly, and usually received with an expression of interest and support by the school administrator. The one facet of consistent praise from the school administrators about the program was the reporting feature which allowed the school administrators to understand what the school social work intern team was about and the expected progress toward the attainment of these specific objectives.

Evaluation of an activity as intangible as what these students were doing is always difficult to do in a thoroughly scientific and impartial manner. On the other hand, it is feasible and necessary to assess in some way the activities in which the interns had been engaged if for no other reason than that they develop a sense of professional security and competence. However, the major reason was so that the school staff members with whom they were associated came to understand the effort being made to determine the results of the activities. The evaluative activities essentially took two forms. The most common form was a written paragraph description of the results of the activities undertaken. The description was in relation to the social work intern team's assessment of whether its objectives had been met. For example,

in the project to increase school-parent communication, the neighborhood outreach workers and school staff members for each one of the neighborhood wrote a joint evaluation report of their activities. The school social work intern literally became a collator and editor of the evaluation reports prepared by the others. The intern then assembled and organized these materials so they could be presented to the appropriate school administrator as a report of the semester's work. From these reports the intern developed recommendations for future activities which would further develop the school-parent communication effort.

In some of the other projects undertaken by the intern teams, it was necessary to return and gather baseline data or reports of other school staff members on their observation of the problem situation. In the illustration of fighting among elementary school children, it was a simple matter of asking the school personnel to again count fights as they had done before and this indicated the success or failure of the interventive activities. In addition, this student intern obtained paragraph descriptions of the student behavior as written by teachers and principal. Combined, this made a comprehensive evaluative report on the progress in reducing the fights among the children at this particular elementary school.

Making a written plan of operation such as outlined here is difficult for students to learn. Usually, the instruction received in methods courses is on how to do it, rather than on demonstrating that what is done will accomplish a specific objective identified prior to the implementation of the social work method. The student interns in

this program did not grasp the importance of the process of maintaining credibility and accountability until some time had passed by. Then questions from colleagues and school officials asking, "What are you doing?" or "What have you done?", were easily addressed. In effect the answer could be, "I'm doing what we agreed was important and necessary and am carrying out my plan."

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